

Hancock Hall  
Third Street  
(Tennessee State Route 57)  
LaGrange  
Fayette County  
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-174

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HANCOCK HALL

HABS No. TN-174

Location: Third Street (Tennessee State Route 57), LaGrange, Fayette County, Tennessee.

Present Owner  
and Occupant: Mrs. Peter Beasley.

Present Use: Residence.

Significance: Perhaps best known for its twin Doric tetra-prostyle porticoes, this stately frame residence was built in 1857 by Dr. John J. Pulliam. It is a fine example of the large plantation type mansions which once graced the small village of LaGrange. It was purchased in 1881 by William F. Hancock, father of the present owner, Mrs. Peter Beasley, whose late husband was a descendant of Dr. Pulliam.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1857.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The chain of title to this property was not located in the records of Fayette County, although three separate attempts were made. It has been passed back and forth among relatives by marriage or by inheritance since it was built. The sequence of these events is given below in section B.

One document which may contain the title to the acreage on which Hancock Hall stands is the will of the present owner's late husband, cited below. This document catalogues several thousand acres of land in two Tennessee counties and in adjacent Mississippi; one of the Fayette County tracts described as "north of Wolf River" may be the residence tract, but is not so designated.

1951 Will August 13, 1949 recorded February 12, 1951 in  
Will Book D page 146  
Peter Raymond Beasley  
to  
Mrs. Peter Raymond Beasley

- B. Historical Context: Family tradition states that Dr. John Junius Pulliam came to LaGrange from Granville County, North Carolina in about 1857. He had purchased two lots in the town as early as 1850;

however, this house is not on those lots. Hancock Hall was begun in 1857 and was used by the Union soldiers as headquarters for Colonel John K. Mizner. Mizner allowed the Pulliam family to remain in two rooms.

In 1875 Dr. Pulliam exchanged homes with Mrs. Olive Winston, a daughter of Major Charles Michie; she moved to Hancock Hall and he to Woodlawn. Captain William Franklin Hancock bought the home from Mrs. Winston in 1881, just before the birth of the present owner. Subsequently Captain Hancock also bought Woodlawn, moved there, and in 1912 sold Hancock Hall to his daughter and her husband, Peter Raymond Beasley. The Beasleys again exchanged the homes, as Mrs. Beasley's parents wished to live closer to town; after the deaths of Captain and Mrs. Hancock, the Beasleys came back to Hancock Hall in late 1916. It remains in the family.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The exterior features of the house include the following: common double-hung windows and louvered shutters; gable-roofed porticoes with Doric columns; hipped roof; and four-paneled doors with sidelights and transoms (including those in the second floor). Interior features include baseboard and cornice moldings; four-panel doors with wood surrounds and transoms; and a curved stairway.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent; the building is well maintained.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 54'-6" x 54'-6" for the major block with an east wing (kitchen) in the northeast corner, creating a near square form. There are two rear porches and porticoes on the south and west facades. The building is five bays wide on both the south and west facades. It is two full stories high with a dimension of 29' from grade to cornice and 36' from grade to ridge.
2. Foundations: The building is supported on brick footings which vary in size about 2'-4" x 1'-4" and stand about 2'-0" to 4'-0" in height. The piers are covered with stucco where they are exposed at the edges.
3. Walls: The building is of wood frame construction covered with wood siding exposing 4-1/2" to the weather and painted white. Walls are 9" thick. The main floor is off grade 3'-4" on the south to 5'-4" at the northwest corner.

4. Structural system, framing: Frame construction.
5. Porches, stoops: The most prominent features of the house exterior are the twin white porticoes on the south and west facades. Each is a two-story wood Doric tetra-prostyle portico (9'-1" x 20'-8" on south; 8'-11" x 20'-4" on west) with columns 21'-4" high (diameter 2'-0" with sixteen flutes). The porches are reached via wooden stairs (five and half risers on the south; eight on west) with 6-1/2" risers and 11-1/2" treads. The entablature of each portico is Ionic without a sculptured frieze, and there is a plain surface tympanum in the pediment. The rear porch (north) is of a later date. It extends across the first floor and is a screened enclosure (a later addition). A small wood porch on the northeast corner of the wing gives access to the kitchen.

It was intended that there be balconies at the second floor under each portico. They were never built.

6. Chimneys: The house has three chimneys. That on the north face of the east wing measures 1'-11" x 3'-9-1/4" and stands 8'-1-1/2" above the cornice. It is brick with a stucco finish, essentially plain but with the top 16" finished off in projecting bricks to form a capping. It is an outside end type. The chimney near the north end of the main block is located on the roof's east slope. It measures 2'-0 3/4" x 3'-5-1/2" and stands 3'-4" above the ridge. It is of exposed brick with the same configuration at the top as the first chimney. The third chimney is situated near the southwest corner of the building on the west slope, south of the west pediment. It measures 2'-0-1/2" x 3'-5" and stands 3'-4" above the ridge. It is also of exposed brick and the same configuration as the other two.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The main entry door is located on the south side. The six-panel door measures 3'-5" x 7'-11" x 1 3/4" and is flanked by pointed-arch sidelights and a three-light transom in a low pointed-arch composition. A similar composition is found on the west facade within the portico. Doorways on the second floor, above the entry doors would have opened onto balconies if they had been constructed. These doors are flanked by rectilinear sidelights and topped with transoms. The door near the center of the rear (north) side measures 3'-0" x 7'-6-1/4" x 1 3/4" and has a large glass panel over two smaller wood panels. It is topped by a three-light transom. A door on the east wall of the east wing

measures 2'-11-1/2" x 6'-11-1/2" x 1 3/8" and has a glass panel and two wood panels. The east wing (kitchen) also has a paneled door on its rear wall, giving access to the small wood porch.

- b. Windows: Double hung windows are used. Across the south facade there are eight windows (two each side of the portico on each level), with 6/6 sash. The first floor windows measure 2'-10" x 7'-11-1/2"; the second floor windows measure 2'-10" x 7'-3". On the west facade appears identical but the spacing of the openings varies slightly. On the east facade there are four windows (two each level) on the front section of the main block. They are similar to the corresponding windows on the south and west. The other east elevation windows (including those in the east wing) vary in size and number of lights (dimensions vary from 1'-11" x 5'-3" to 2'-10" x 7'-11-1/2") and have either 4/4 or 6/6 lights. The north facade has windows similar to the rest. There are four on the second level, those at the left side being 4/4 lights; those to the right 6/6. On the first floor there are two 6/6 windows at the right side and one 4/4 at the left side.

All windows have working shutters on the exterior. They are painted green. On most shutters (south, west facades, and original windows on the other facades) have the lower panel of movable louvers, the upper panel fixed.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The main block is topped with a hip roof which corresponds to the near-square plan of the house. The portico gables tie into the corresponding roofs. The roofs of the rear porches are a shed type.

All roofs have raised seam sheet metal coverings, laid atop rough sawn wood sheathing. They are painted red.

- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a box cornice projecting 20-1/2" from the wall surface and having a height of 18". The fascia is 12" and the soffit measures 16-1/2". The cornice carries around the entire building and passes over the porticoes. The molding on the pediment is the same as the cornice molding.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Although there is a crawl space below the building, there is no basement.

- b. First floor: Access to the building is made into a large entry hall situated at the center of the south side, which is divided into two parts. In the southeast corner is the dining room; in the southwest is the parlor. The latter has built-in shelving along the north wall to a height of about 4'.

The stairhall is located in the center room of the entry hall, with the stairs on the east wall. To the west of the stairhall is a study which has a doorway opening onto the west portico. In the northwest corner of the building is a bedroom. To the north of the stairhall is a small chamber serving as a hallway to the rear (north) porch. This room has a small bathroom on the east side. Along the rear east side of the building is a kitchen, with spaces for pantry and storage.

- c. Second floor: The stairway gives access to the second floor stairhall which has a small bathroom tucked into its southeast corner. There are three rooms along the south side of the building, and three along the west (the southwest corner room being counted twice). The center rooms on the south and west sides have exterior doors which would have given access to the balconies. The balconies were never built. There is a small chamber in the rear of the stairhall.
- 2. Stairways: There is only one stairway in the house. It is located in the stairhall which is in about the middle of the house. The stairs are 3'-3-1/2" wide. It has approximately twenty-two risers of 7-1/4" with scrollwork stringers. The balusters and newel post are turned wood. The molded wood handrail is 2'-6-1/2" high. Ascent is made along the east wall, winding to the left at the north wall, with landing to the second floor. The outside wall is curved to receive the curved form of the stairway.
  - 3. Flooring: 3" to 6" floor boards of pine.
  - 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Wood lath and plaster on all surfaces. Walls have wallpaper covering.
  - 5. Openings:
    - a. Doorways and doors: All interior doors have three-light glass transoms over. The doors are 3'-3" x 7'-6-1/2" x 1 3/4" with four panels; the transoms are 3'-3" x 1'-7-1/2" high. All doors have wood trim surrounds. Most trim is 10", while some plain trim is 5-1/4". A wood archway supported on wood pilasters separates the two portions of the entry hall. There is no closure in this archway.

- b. Windows: (Not recorded).
- 6. Decorative features and trim: Noticeable upon entry is the archway and the stairway mentioned above. There are a 12" baseboard molding in all rooms and a 5" cornice molding.
- 7. Hardware: The original brass rim locks have been removed but are still in the possession of the owner. The rest of the hardware is of a standard variety, i.e., butt hinges, knobs and door plates.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, etc.: Each of the major rooms in the house has a fireplace. There are ten fireplaces, most of which are closed over. The fireplaces have wood mantels with cast-iron fire boxes within. Gas heaters are vented through the flues.  
  
Forced air system is used, with vents cut into the floors. The equipment is located in the crawlspace below the building.
  - b. Lighting: There is electrical service in the building.
  - c. Plumbing: There are two interior bathrooms, added later.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The house is located on the north side of State Route 57, about one mile from the center of town. It is situated about 200 feet back from the highway with a landscaped lawn in front. The house faces south, with the large porticoes on the south front and west side.
- 2. Historic landscape design: The gardens were laid out by an English landscape architect. There is a long brick sidewalk on the entrance axis. Shrubs and trees flank this axis. The trees are cedar. There are cedar, oak and pine trees on the rest of the front lawn. Trimmed hedges line the property line on all sides.
- 3. Outbuildings: There is a 22'-4" x 16'-6-1/2" smokehouse to the north-northeast of the house. It stands about 17' high and is topped with a hip roof. A cottage 18'-4" x 34'-4" with a hip roof and ca. 13' high is located to the east of the smokehouse. Beyond these structures to the northeast is a garage structure. It measures 22'-1-1/2" x 26'-3" x about 14' to the ridge of the off-center gable roof. There is a small storage shed immediately to the east of the house. It measures 10'-2-1/4" x 7'-2-1/4" x ca. 12' high.

(Note: There are separate HABS files for the Smokehouse [HABS No. TN-174-A] and the Storage Shed [HABS No. TN-174-B]).

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interview: Beasley, Mrs. Peter Raymond. Interview July 17, 1972.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Probate records. Source and location not indicated.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Brandau, Roberta Seawell, ed. History of Homes and Gardens of Tennessee. Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1936, p. 301. Some information about the gardens at Hancock Hall was by error printed under Woodlawn on p. 300 in this volume.

Meacham, Catherine. "Ancestral Home in Family for 115 Years," Memphis Press Scimitar (July 27, 1965).

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### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This 1972 project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the West Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by Robert C. Ciebner (University of Arizona), project supervisor, and Richard H. Hulan, project historian (Nashville), with architects James D. Skelton (University of Illinois) and Mark D. Frederickson (University of Arizona) and student architect John P. Vergos (University of Tennessee) at the Memphis, Tennessee field office on the campus of Memphis State University.



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The written data was edited in Summer 1985 by Susan McCown, HABS Architectural Historian in the Washington, D.C. office, for transmittal to the Library of Congress.

Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, took the photographs of the house in March 1974.